

# DRAMA



**THEATRE ARCHITECTURE:**

**JOHN BURRELL**

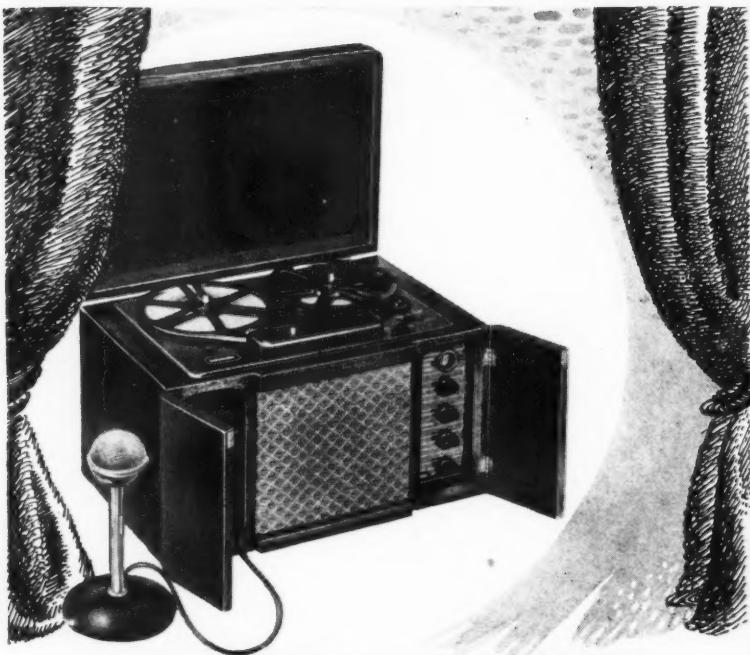
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*Autumn, 1949*

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Houston Rogers

**"THE BEAUX' STRATAGEM"**

*John Clements and Kay Hammond in the revival of George Farquhar's play  
at the Lyric Theatre.*

# DRAMA

*The Quarterly Theatre Review*

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NEW SERIES

AUTUMN 1949

NUMBER 14

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THEATRE Architecture" is the subject most often dealt with in this issue of DRAMA: and indeed it is of paramount importance at present. Soon we are to see the building of a National Theatre. The new powers conferred on Local Authorities last year are already leading to the conversion of existing buildings into theatres, and plans for new theatres are being talked over. The Schools and County Colleges which are springing up in response to the demands of the 1944 Education Act will all have halls, and the need to make these suitable for dramatic performances is being strongly stressed. What are, then, the essentials of a good theatre-building? It is the most important of all questions for us, and, as Mr. John Christie pointed out at last year's Conference, it is we, not the architects, who must give the answers.

Two kinds of evidence are fortunately available to help us. First, that of the past. We are becoming able not only to know about, but also to experience as audience, the playhouses of the great ages. In one week, Bradfield College presented the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus in its smaller but essentially accurate reproduction of the theatre at Epidaurus, and Harrow School gave *Macbeth* on a platform stage the actual size (and a vast size it is) of Shake-

peare's at the Globe. The Georgian Playhouse at Richmond is coming to life again, as Richard Southern describes. These and other experiences, as well as many researches, are stimulating in us the accurate imagination of how the plays of the past were played: and so enabling us better to estimate how our modern buildings should provide for them.

We are learning too to understand better the relationship between actors and audience. This relationship, ever changing as the nature of society changes, is yet the fixed, eternal necessity of the theatre; and on its contribution to a good relationship the success of any theatre building ultimately depends.

The second kind of evidence before us consists of some contemporary projects for theatres. In this issue we show two, the Oxford University Theatre project, models of which were exhibited at Harrogate, and the R.A.D.A. theatre plan. Each is designed, as every building should be, with a clearly defined special purpose, hard thinking has gone into their creation, and whether the reader agrees with the conclusion reached or whether he doesn't, they will stimulate and help him to think out the problems of his own theatre.

# PLAYS IN PERFORMANCE

by Peter Forster

THE casualty rate in the West End lately has been high. In fact, as I look through the names of plays I have seen during the past quarter, I am unable to remember some of them. Who, for instance, was *Miss Turner's Husband*? And who cared, except Miss Turner? What Samson of Shaftesbury Avenue ordered *Champagne for Delilah*? And who grew or gave *Two Dozen Red Roses*? (Oh yes, I vaguely remember that one: a comedy with Edwin Styles but no style). Nor can I bring back to mind a single line from the verse-play *Stone in the Midst*—a title which meant nothing if you did not know a particular poem by Yeats and very little if you did. Then again, all that has remained in my mind of that strange little piece of hill-ballet, *Dark of the Moon*, is a mingled impression of some clever stage-grouping and two immensely natty witches who made me quite look forward to next Hallowe'en. It is all confusing. Alas, where are the plays of yesterweek?

The casualty which deserved better luck was Basil Thomas's *Shooting Star*. This probably failed because although anybody can find Charing Cross easily enough the only simple way to find the Playhouse is to fall off the end platform of the station. *Shooting Star* is worth a mention because amateurs might well take up this unpretentious little comedy (7 m., 4 f.) about an exploited football-player. In London it gave James Hayter a chance to romp around as a Laughtonesque bully-boy of a manager, but in any non-professional production the honours must surely go to the footballer's dithering but determined wife—a part that would come naturally enough to a nervous amateur but which called for some very real acting ability from Charmian Eyre.

Among more persistent presentations has been Farquhar's *The Beaux' Stratagem*—a fine flower of late Restoration Comedy. Comparisons with *The Relapse* are likely but unfortunate—the present play is neither so complicated in plot nor so bawdy in dialogue, and it suffers on both counts in that audiences never try to follow the plots of old plays anyway, while there is nothing they enjoy more than a dirty joke which has respectability of sorts conferred upon it because it occurs in a "straight" play. Reaction to John Clements' production depends on one's feelings about these modern, ingenuous, semi-balletic refurbishings of old comedies: I thought his inventiveness less inspired than that shown by Gielgud and Olivier in the same field, but it will all do well enough and Clements himself gives an excellent, honest, straightforward performance as the impoverished gentleman masquerading as his friend's valet. Robert Eddison potters agreeably as the friend, but Kay Hammond's *forte* is to appear at once kittenish and catty, and that is not quite what the great part of Mrs. Sullen demands. I prefer this actress in modern comedy; however she had the audience laughing in the right places, though the famous speech ending: "Hark 'ee, sister, I'm not superhuman" went for very little.

In the matter of *The Lady's Not For Burning* at the Globe I find myself dissenting from the generally favourable critical reception. But I congratulate Mr. Gielgud on his courage (has any man done more for our stage in the past twenty years?) Plays by poets are sometimes presented in the West End, but the poet is seldom still alive at the time of presentation. Christopher Fry's play (period 1400,

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"DARK IS THE MOON"

*The Revival Meeting scene from Peter Brook's production at the Ambassadors.*

Angus McBean

atmosphere 1948) tells how a soldier of fortune who 'gins to be a-weary of this life, and an uninhibited little miss suspected of witchcraft, set by their ears the local mayor and his retinue. It is useless to seek a point in the play; it has a thousand points and it has none. "What a wonderful thing is Metaphor!" says a character. Indeed, one has heard of Metaphor being ridden to death, but seldom can she have taken such a beating and bruising as she does nightly at the Globe. Mr. Fry has indubitable flashes—and he is greatly aided throughout by the incomparable Gielgud voice which could, of course, make the weather forecast sound like poetry—but outrageous comparisons are not necessarily poetic and in the main I fear that, like Gladstone in Disraeli's phrase, Mr. Fry is intoxicated by the exuberance of his own verbosity. He may be a Lord of Language—he is not yet a Lord and Master.

The humour of the piece puzzles me even more. When the mayor tells the applicant for hanging, "You must fill in the necessary forms!" it is mildly amusing (albeit in a style more suited to revue) but the constant interpolation of the modern idiom is irritating rather than witty. Too much of the joking consists of schoolboy banter, elementary play on words, and the attitudinizing of a 'varsity hoax; it is less a play than an intellectual "shaggy-dog" story. One humbly suggests that if Mr. Fry wishes to write high comedy or debunk the past or master crazy humour, he should fortify his natural talents by learning the lessons that had to be learned in these fields by Congreve, Shaw, and the Marx Brothers respectively.

But there are several compensations. There is Mr. Gielgud at his most dazzling; having hardly any character to come to terms with he somehow achieves a compendium of all his best-known parts with a technique that must make young actors despair.

There is Pamela Brown, a major actress with a habit of playing minor roles, equally impressive; my only reservation being that I thought Miss Brown probably was a witch; with her strange beauty and enchantress's voice she is quite capable of transforming the rest of the cast into frogs whenever she wants; she certainly casts a spell over her audience. There are excellent performances by the whole cast (Harcourt Williams especially good, unobtrusively) and the production is second to none in London. Lastly there is Oliver Messel's exquisite set, with its glimpses of the countryside in the background, and its tall graceful arches complete in detail even to a blackbird which spent the first act perched attentively on top of a pillar. After that he vanished. I suspect he was taken away lest he should start to sing for that would have put Mr. Fry to shame.

More to my taste is *Ann Veronica* at the Piccadilly. It should not have succeeded: it had the tiresome device whereby the audience is addressed directly; it had complicated sets almost as wild as Wilder; it had a semi-cinematic technique aided by a revolving stage; it had music so lush that one was surprised not to find Richard Addinsell's name on the programme. I repeat: *Ann Veronica* had no right to come off. But the fact is that it comes off triumphantly—and it is dishonest to argue that because it should not have succeeded therefore it has not done so. Ronald Gow and Jack Hylton have devised an exception to prove every theatrical rule.

But the great success of this adaptation of an H. G. Wells novel about the suffragette of 1909 who revolts against suburbia and falls in love with a married man, is due largely to Wendy Hiller. She has immense natural pathos, and it is this power that puts her among the three best actresses on our stage today (why, oh why, does she not play Beatrice and Imogen and

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Viola and the great parts created for players of her quality?). Her performance here is the more remarkable because she carries the whole serious burden of the play. The adaptation plumps largely for laughter, and it is almost a question of Hiller versus revolving stage, dialogue, and Cyril Ritchard, who turns the part of Ann's aristocratic suitor into a little revue sketch of his own. (Again wholly impermissible; again entirely successful!) He is deliciously funny, with his inimitable way of suggesting that he is really rather a "bounder" in his own heart. (Curious that we have

plenty of stage cads, and hardly any bounders: there is a great difference). But it is Wendy Hiller's evening and it gives her the chance to pull out most of the stops on her register. I can still hear her voice when she confesses her love for Bernard Capes (Robert Harris), in a scene that could easily have been bathetic; how he asks who could love him, and how she replies "I do," with an infinitely touching half-raised lilt on the second word. But then the whole evening is most absorbing, amusing, moving; it may not be altogether true to Wells, but it is certainly true to itself.

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## THE ART OF MOVEMENT ON THE STAGE

*by Rudolf Laban*

THE fascinating shapes of expressive movement which can be observed in acting and dancing have a meaning which we cannot fully describe in words. The streamlined shapes of machines are also fascinating, but in a certain sense they are intellectually analysable. They are even the result of intricate calculations by engineering designers. How are the shapes of the stage artist's movements designed? This is the question which deeply concerns the stage artist.

Drama, Opera, and Ballet are the corporate works of actors, singers, dancers and stage designers joining in the creation of a theatrical performance. Any theatrical performance requires a certain form of bodily expression and the art of movement on the stage embraces therefore the whole range from the actors' speech and movement, to dance mime, and to

pure dance with its musical accompaniment.

The visible and audible means of the performers' expression are exclusively movements. The movements used on the stage are those of the body and of the voice-producing organs. Music, acting, and dancing are manifestations of dynamic art produced by human movement with all its physical, emotional, and mental implications. Each phase of dynamic art fades away as soon as it has appeared. This may be contrasted to a solid work of static art perhaps best exemplified by a still-life painting, where the expressive power of the artist is perpetuated in a static form. The static arts have their part in the decor.

Movement characterises the moving individual, but it can also be characteristic for the surroundings. The milieu of a scene or action will colour the movements of the actor, which will

be different, say, in a salon of the eighteenth century and in a slum bar of our time. The persons represented in the two scenes might be similar characters, but they will adapt their behaviour to the movement atmosphere of an epoch or of a locality. One can thus discern:

- Movements adapted to a character
- Movements adapted to an action of the character,
- Movements adapted to a situation when a character is in conflict with another personality,
- Movements adapted to locality or an epoch in a certain period style.

How do these adaptations take place? The whole of the human body, due to its anatomical and physiological structure, is capable of moving. It is linked into one whole by an elaborate nervous network which is always in a partial state of excitability. An impulse at any point of the network produces a specific movement in a definite part of the body.

The mobility of the body of a living being serves in the first instance the purpose of securing the necessities of life, an activity which can be summed up in one word, work. Work involves conflict and struggle. Conflicts arise with the surroundings, with material, and also with the instincts, capacities, and moods of one person or of several persons. To the conflicts with the surroundings man has added the struggle with an imagined world of moral and spiritual values. In the theatre the conflict within the world of human values—material or spiritual—is represented in art form.

Working actions on the stage are always the expression of an idea and have no real practical purpose. Although he is acting on a very warm day an actor might light a fire in order to express that the room in which he plays is supposed to be cold. The use of working movements in such a scene is an imitation of an everyday action.

The astonishing fact is that there

exists no expressive movement which cannot be recognised as some form or part of a working movement. The movements used in chopping wood consist of repeated hits of the forearm. The same movements are made as the result of an inner excitement, of course without hatchet and wood, symbolising a hit out at the cause of the excitement, an adversary. The throwing of wood in the fireplace can be exactly repeated in a gesture rejecting a disagreeable idea or proposal. The examples of expressive movements similar to parts of everyday working actions are legion. However small the actor's movements may be, one can always recognise the working effort elements in them. In the education of the actor all the basic working actions, such as "pressing," "thrusting," "wringing," "slashing," "gliding," "dabbing," "flicking," and "stirring," should be trained. All these possibilities require a different effort on the part of the worker and some he will be able to perform more successfully than others. The actor should develop an all round movement capacity instead of using only one or two of his favourite efforts. Special attention has to be paid to movements of the eyes, eyelids, and eyebrows. Eye movements can be done with the head immobile or they can be combined with liftings, sinkings and turnings of the face. Movements of the hands and fingers dealing with objects, as playing about with them, are to be distinguished from the hand movements which have no discernible object. Sounds and words are formed by movements of the speech organs and these movements have their roots in the same basic actions mentioned above. Sounds can be produced resulting in the pressing, thrusting, or other accents of words which express the inner mood of the speaker. Movements of the mouth part of the face are here important. These are a few examples of the range of movement expression in which the actor must be trained.



*Art of Movement Studio, Manchester*

**THE ICOSAHEDRON**

*used by students of Rudolf Laban to control the shapes of their expressive gestures and their relationship in the group.*

It will be seen that continued slashing movements as seen in an aggressive person represent quite a different mood from continual gliding movements. The latter may be characteristic perhaps for a priest peacefully blessing his congregation. Other strong contrasts can be seen in the meeting of an old woman pressed down with age and sorrow with two flippant young girls who indulge in carefree flicking gestures. A girl with dreamily floating movements telling about her love contrasts sharply to her father who asserts himself with thrusting his fist onto the table telling her that she cannot marry the boy whom she has chosen.

An actor never uses one effort only. An infinite variety of movements can be observed and trained by transitions and mixtures of basic efforts comparable to the blending into one another of the basic colours of the rainbow. For example, in the solving of a problem the actor may use twisting "wringing" movements to show that he is worried about the subject. These may be transformed into a direct "pressing" movement revealing his concentration. As the solution comes nearer the pressing is modified by an ease in tension which develops to a light gliding movement of satisfaction. If the efforts had been performed in the reverse order a different story would have been told. Starting in a light mood of satisfaction expressed by a flowing gesture, the tale could end in a mood of depression and worry pictured by heavy efforts of the body. Thus through a series of transitions effort rhythms are built up, the study and analysis of which enables the actor to create the movements of various characters in different situations.

The shapes and rhythms of a character's habitual movements, both visible and audible, speak a clear language. The language of movement is built up by series of efforts which follow each other in certain mutations and transitions. Man uses the secret

code of this language mostly in an unconscious manner, but the actor must first observe and study a character's effort behaviour before he can live the part.

It is important to realise that a general movement and effort training of the actor does not constitute a special new method of acting. Any style and even the most conventional ones will gain enormously in vitality of expression if the rules of movement incorporated in them are recognised and well applied. Suppose an actor has to perform a folk dance in a particular play. The usual procedure is that he learns some steps mostly with great difficulty and the result is unconvincing. The manner of moving of the race in question might be alien to his body and mind. His personal movement habits might be so different from those of the people he has to represent that he cannot find any approach to the steps. If he would know that these steps are the expression of a definite inner attitude and that the fiery or heavy character of the dance consists of recognisable basic efforts, he could train himself much more easily to assimilate the external form together with the essential dramatic mood underlying the steps. The same is the case with all the audible effort expressions. Pitch of voice, phrasing and rhythms are always characteristic for a definite inner effort or mood. Period styles consist of movement habits which have been used by a community in a definite epoch of history. For the actor merely to imitate certain styles and tricks he has seen in a fashionable play is not sufficient. He must penetrate into the deeper causes of bodily behaviour which can be found in characteristic movement efforts.

The whole range of human behaviour and aspiration is expressed by movement. The mastery of the art of movement is therefore paramount for the stage artist and should be the basis of any training for the stage.

# YOUNG AUDIENCES

*by George Devine*

THIS is an exciting age for the theatre artist. A short visit to the recent Birmingham Exhibition was sufficient to show the various experiments in new forms of expression and architecture which are in the process of development. Since the last war, and partly because of it, one new field of experiment has been opened up—I refer to the efforts to provide a properly organised type of theatre appealing to the young audience, the theatre-goers of the future.

None of us yet knows what is the best type of theatre to provide for the young. There are plenty of people who think they know, and who strongly resent any suggestion that there is any other point of view than their own. But three and a half years' work with the Young Vic, and attendance at many conferences and discussions, has convinced me that the solution has not yet been found. I believe that John Allen, the director of the Glyndebourne Children's Theatre, whose experience is of longer standing than mine, would bear me out in this. There are quite a number of people who dislike the idea of experiments being made at all with such a tender subject as the child's mind, and would prefer to postpone action for the sake of further discussion. We in the Young Vic have sometimes been criticised for not "taking advice" from those who live and work with the young; but we find such advice valuable only because we try, honestly and sincerely, to put on actual shows. We and all who are interested will discover in this way the answers to our problems. In fact, we are not ashamed to be called experimental—we are proud of it.

It has often occurred to me that the Amateur Theatre could make its contribution to this movement. It may already do so, without my knowledge, but in my quite considerable contacts with the amateur world I have not spotted any great activity. For the serious minded company, there can be no greater thrill. The young spectator is so much more alive and responsive than the adult. He sits on the edge of his seat; for him, it is an emotional springboard, not an armchair. He sees all and hears all, nothing slips his notice. He is exacting and grateful. His so-called "theatre manners" may not be perfect, but in the right circumstances he will be above "manners," spellbound by the true communion between player and public. I have come to the belief that it is never the fault of the young people if they get out of hand. I think that they find it easier to be receptive to young and keen actors, whereas the older and very practised artist may baffle them with his skill and personality, but he will not really win them into a simple state of receptivity.

Acting for young audiences must first and foremost be sincere. It must be true to character, mood and situation. It must be clear and strong acting. Any uncertainty or lack of conviction will lose the interest. Young people are very responsive to shape, to rhythm, to words, to poetry and to sound. They call for the maximum of projection from the actor. The comparison with the Elizabethan audience is obvious. What could be more stimulating than to play to such audiences? And, let it be said, more exhausting to the player who takes his work seriously? And no other attitude



Keystone

*A scene from "The Snow Queen" performed by the Young Vic*

can, of course, be tolerated. The least carelessness or condescension to such a public is a betrayal of the art of acting. It is for these reasons that I recommend the young audience to any actor, amateur or professional, but he must give of his best and his best must not be second-rate.

Production for young audiences must be simple and direct. It must tell the story of the play, and not decorate it with intellectual or psychological frills. The production must be true to the drama, and not to any literary or historical approach. The young imagination will work within any stage convention which is well and truly

carried out; it will enjoy considerable calls upon its invention. Present it with something tawdry and miserably representational, and it will devastate the insufficient object with scornful and meticulous criticism. When we put on *The King Stag* there was a parrot in the action of the play. It was a dummy, a puppet. The youngsters accepted its reality completely. We thought we would be clever and make it fly off into the wings. But we did not do it well enough—the wings did not move, and sometimes the "invisible" trick lines caught the light and showed. In that instant, the parrot lost face and was dismissed. A grown-up will

forget and forgive, but never a youngster.

For our third season, we attempted Shakespeare. Not until then, because we were convinced that we had to know more before such a venture. It is easy enough to say that all young people love Shakespeare, but it is unfortunately an adult wishful-thought. The Elizabethan mode of expression, quite apart from the language which is usually not too difficult, requires considerable technical skill in handling to keep it constantly alive for those who are accustomed to a more direct method of human communication. The actors developed a feeling for lightness and clarity which enabled them to put over long speeches to an audience which, in many cases, had no theatre experience of any kind.

But the need is certainly for more than Shakespeare and the classics. I am sure that plays of adventure, plays about the modern world, presented with imagination, would win the young audience at once. If the adult theatre is short of playwrights, so is the theatre for young people. I have read a large

number of plays written for young audiences, and most of them are sadly sentimental and out of date. We will not really reach the enthusiastic hearts of our public until we have the right material and are encouraged to present it.

I would like to conclude with a word about architecture. However simple, however elaborate, there must be a good relationship between every member of the young audience and the stage. It is not merely a question of seeing and hearing, although these factors are vital. Extra wattage and amplification can never replace the human contact which the actor must have with his public. The amount of projection which the actor can use will depend upon the style of the play, and the young spectator must be exonerated if he becomes restless while listening to a thirty-line speech in blank verse at a distance of 200 feet from the actor. This absurdity has, in fact, taken place, and may still have to take place until there are more of the right theatres available for this fundamental necessity in our theatrical life.

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## RICHMOND REDIVIVUS

*by Richard Southern*

TO "bring to life again" must always be a hazardous act. What unknown personality will come up when a century-dead skeleton is raised and re-fleshed to meet us, we cannot guess. Richmond Theatre in Yorkshire, was a living thing when Covent Garden was only fifty-seven years old, and when George III had still thirty-two years to reign; thus it was with a little trepidation that one thought of a modern audience of

200 people, coming from the first Amateur Theatre Week at Harrogate in 1949, to this building that had begun to live in 1788, and had been almost dead as a playhouse since the 1850s. Since a century of oblivion intervened between the living visitors and the last of the players on those boards, what flavour of a theatre would be left? How much meaning in the disposition of the venerable boxes and proscenium . . . ?

In the early afternoon of June 8th, the first relay of these 200 visitors stood, and sat, about the old auditorium—carefully distributed so as to spread their weight over structure that was still undergoing reinforcement. The workmen were in. The one-time pit gaped, a floor-less hole to the foundations. The brilliant sun shone on the 900-year-old town as ten minutes were carefully allotted to a description of the building, ten more to a free tour of inspection, and then for a final ten, the spectators reassembled to hear a few quiet speeches from the Shakespeare plays delivered from the oldest stage-boards in Britain. The workmen paused in their task of restoring the Georgian pit and building up walls removed a century ago to change the theatre to a store; and they heard actor's lines spoken in the theatre again. As Robert Speaight and Martin Browne spoke, it became clear that once more the public had accepted the theatre; the theatre had accepted its public; and affection was established.

The immediate question, to one spectator at least, was: how would the stage of Richmond Theatre prove as a platform for an actor? How would the Georgian auditorium justify itself as a means of intimate contact between speaker and spectator?

It became clearly certain that the experiment would be positive. But one or two scarcely-foreseen points came out as well. The intimacy was there without a shadow of doubt; an advance to the "footlights" brought the speaker into such close contact with the hearers that the most delicate whisper could be communicated. The lift of a hand—even the straightening of the body—caught the spectators' attention and commanded receptive silence. The house was alive and intent.

But to one who knew the Elizabethan speeches and had heard them in many surroundings, a surprising conviction came home—that such lines were not ideally those that suited this theatre.

True, the most delicate passages became perhaps more vivid than before. But the full flush of the Elizabethan player seemed in check. It was very clear that the little Georgian forestage could not serve the purpose of the great Elizabethan projecting platform from which it had descended. In the Elizabethan and Jacobean playhouses, a player at the front of the stage had stood in the very geometrical centre of a circular audience. At Richmond this was different. A strong appeal was there as the slightly uplifted face of the imagined player came downstage and addressed us, but the great space for striding and banners, where

*the Plague of an Impostured Braynes  
(Breaking out) infects a theatre, and holly  
raignes,  
Killing the Heavers hearts,*

was missing.

It was then that Richmond communicated its latest and freshest lesson on the history of acting. For one suddenly realised what it meant that Garrick (like so many others admittedly, but surely pre-eminent among those who had become famous for bringing a new "naturalness" to acting. Others acted, Garrick was. It became clear that part of Garrick's genius rested on the changed form of the stage—that this sort of theatre, though it might not perfectly serve the high actor of the old Betterton type with his great gesture and his chanting—yet for a player of the (then) new type, with the "natural" delivery of a Garrick, it was the perfect instrument indeed.

The results of this visit then, which may be described as a theatrical experiment of some importance, are these:

Richmond theatre has an auditorium that possesses charm for an audience to-day. This charm is not solely on account of the great historical interest of its layout, nor because there is no other theatre left like it in the world.

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but also (and chiefly) because, as an auditorium, it is so disposed that the spectator can partake most intimately of what is given on the stage. The little forestage is highly significant; its narrow five feet is yet sufficient to allow the player to come out of the artificial picture and bring his human side right into the human world and be of it. This intimacy is not alone owing to the small size of the theatre. Some 120 persons can be adequately seated (when the workmen are finished) but even smaller theatres may lack this satisfying and adequate sense of grouping that inclines one to receive the lightest breath from the stage. Nor can it be said that all the seats possess a good view of the stage—the second row of the side-gallery seats is almost unsighted from most of the action; yet even here one can lean back and not lose a word of the drama. The play is still present with one.

But that it is *not*, in a genuine sense; an Elizabethan theatre is a further discovery of importance. Certainly revivals of Shakespeare and of the Restoration dramatists were seen here in their day, but they were revivals in a contemporary key. The Elizabethan stage is farthest back. We may now see how a similar experiment in a great Elizabethan playhouse might reform altogether our whole conception of Shakespeare's company and its style. We do not perhaps sufficiently realise how the style of British acting has developed, and that, concurrently, the style of British playwriting and the style of British theatre-design have also gone step for step each taking the trend that suited the others. The late-Georgian play of the clear, reasonable, slightly-emphasised sentiment, fits

*The actor on the forestage of a Georgian Playhouse, in close communion with his audience.*



*Reproduced by courtesy of Common Ground.*

the Richmond auditorium ideally, and the school of acting that Garrick left us, with its intimacy and its considerable steps towards naturalism, is the very breath, as it were, of these boards, which this day began to live again. The lessons of a carefully restored Richmond—for which we still need care and time and money—are essential to our understanding of the theatre's life.

EDITOR'S NOTE : Mr. Richard Southern, from whose book "*The Georgian Playhouse*"

the above illustration is taken, has been responsible for the rediscovery and restoration of Richmond Playhouse, which he took the British Drama League party to see.

# “WE ARE RATHER FAR BACK, I'M AFRAID”

*by John Burrell*

WHAT is the fundamental task that confronts the theatre architect? Is it the provision of more mechanisms on the stage? Is it the comfort of the audience before, during and after the play? Is it some new treatment of the proscenium area, or fresh magic with lighting? All these and countless other elements will form part of his solution but the philosophy that will guide him is man's relationship to man, expressed in the physical relationship between actors and playgoers. Actor is a fine word. Audience is a poor one, for those who go to a play have more to do than hear. The word Spectator won't do as it has a passive suggestion, and Public, though flattering, is a trifle vulgar. No, Playgoer is the word, with its connotations of enthusiasm and participation.

What is this participation? And how do we participate? To begin with, both actors and playgoers converge on an agreed time of starting, which makes each performance an occasion. We have come to see the actors themselves and feel that they are acting for us personally, whereas in the cinema the film goes mechanically on whether we are there or not. When we laugh in the theatre we know the actors hear us. Our enjoyment, and theirs, is increased. If we are deeply moved we know that the actor feels exhilarated by the loud hush of our choking hearts filling the air. And at the end we applaud him and his fellows and they respond modestly and gratefully. We have become friends.

The cinema screen has made one very

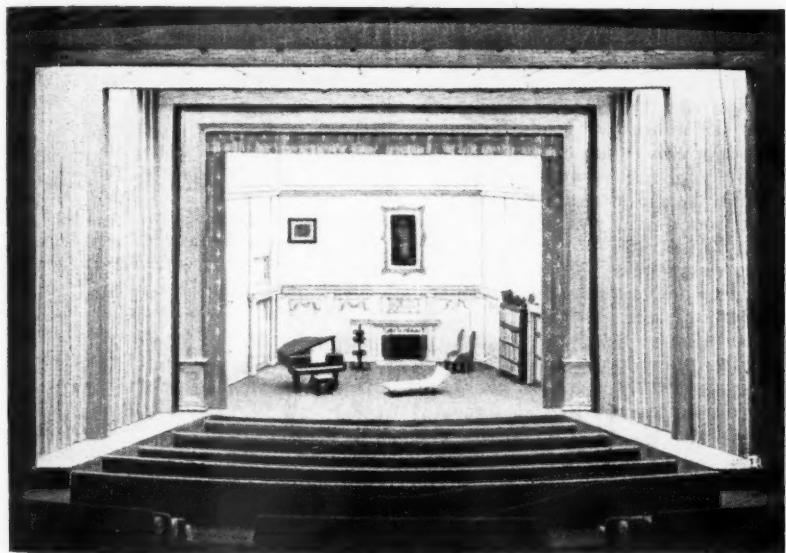
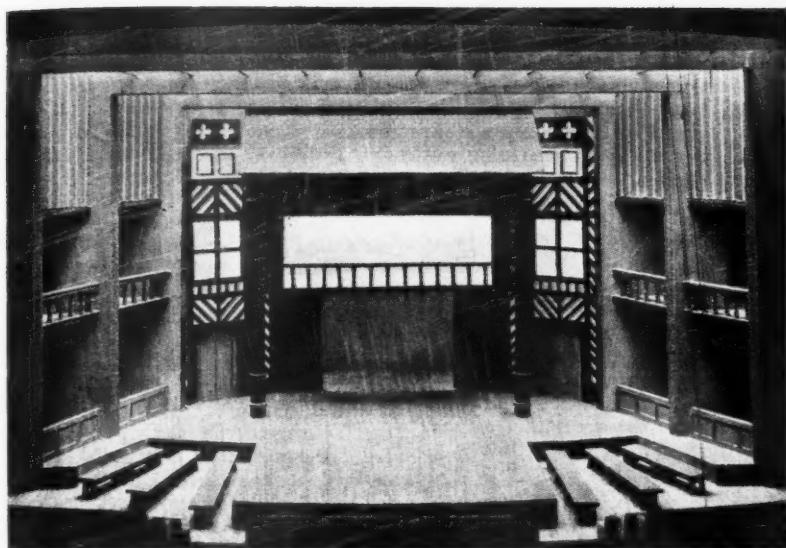
important contribution to playgoing. It has made us realise sharply and deeply that we go to the theatre to see living actors. In the cinema the camera enables the audience to move its viewpoint between the extremes of close-up and panorama. Infinite subtleties of voice and expression are projected to the furthest seats. But in the theatre, no. The size of the actor remains constant. The playgoer's relation to the stage remains the same throughout according to the position of his seat. This scale relationship of actor to playgoer is as elusive as it is important, and theatres possessing it are the exception rather than the rule.

What do we need then to get this relationship, this contact? Two things. We must bring the actor forward out of the proscenium frame and we must gather the playgoers round him. The theatre that has this formation speaks welcome as you take your seat. You feel wanted. You feel part of it—"I'll be an auditor; an actor too perhaps, if I see cause." The playwright and the actor will do their best to give you cause.

In my preoccupation with this element of theatre design I made notes on a number of theatres and theatre projects recently visited.

## BRITISH THEATRE EXHIBITION, BIRMINGHAM

One of my chief reasons for the visit was to see a performance of Shakespeare scenes given in an "Elizabethan theatre." The acknowledgement



#### THE OXFORD UNIVERSITY THEATRE PROJECT

*Photographs, reproduced from the Report of the Oxford University Drama Commission, of two of the models showing the transformation of the stage and forepart of the auditorium from Elizabethan to "Modern Drawing-Room."*  
Architect, Frederick Gibberd, F.R.I.B.A.

in the programme reads: "This . . . is an attempt to reconstruct, within the space available, the main features common to most Elizabethan stages" I was excited at the thought, since my nearest contact with an Elizabethan theatre to date had been the tiny Maddermarket at Norwich.

During a tour of the rest of this excellent Exhibition I found a scale model reconstruction of the Globe Theatre, which was a vivid reminder that the playhouse of this period derived its whole shape and character from the strolling players' platform set up in the Inn yard and overlooked by galleries and windows from all sides. I spent some time dreaming my way into it: till suddenly it was time to go to the performance.

Far away at the end of a long, narrow hall, I saw the Elizabethan stage with its two pillars, roof and balcony. All the seats were on ground level, albeit slightly raised at the back, and all but a handful facing the front of the stage. No seats looked down on the stage, and there was no attempt to gather the audience round the stage. The performance started. The actors cocked apprehensive eyes at the distant seats and manfully yelled their lines. I twisted round and watched the spectators. There was no contact. The general expression was a kind of bewildered anxiety, changing to apathy and inattention in the back rows. The great experiment was a fizz-out. I do not criticise the organisers of the Exhibition, who could not alter the proportions of the Hall at their disposal. I merely record the reasons why the experiment, in my opinion, failed. Here was proof indeed that the actor and playgoer cannot nod acquaintance, but must hug friendship.

#### AMATEUR THEATRE WEEK, HARROGATE

At the B.D.L. Exhibition I examined

the plans and models of the proposed Oxford University Theatre. It is a most ingenious scheme to provide in one building the five main types of playhouse structure: Greek, Elizabethan, Restoration, Victorian and, for want of a better description, Modern "Drawing-Room." This is done by the use of three permanent proscenium frames, the space between each being either closed by shutters for Greek and "Drawing-Room," or filled with doors and boxes appropriate to the Elizabethan and Victorian styles. For the Restoration and Georgian type, where three sets of boxes are required, a fourth "false" proscenium is added. The area below these frames can be altered: for the Greek style a flat "orchestra", or dancing-place for chorus, at floor level can be made; for the Elizabethan style a thrust out forestage with benches at floor level on either side: for Restoration a similar forestage spanning the whole width between the second and third frames: for the Victorian and "Drawing-Room" the third proscenium forms a picture-frame to the stage, in front of which is a band pit. The variations are flexible and, by and large, achieve their object, in providing the characteristics and stage shapes of the above styles. The seats in the first seven rows can be altered or removed to suit the style in use. But the major part of the auditorium (not shown in the models) is not so imaginatively treated. It is a cinema-type auditorium stretching very far back with its side walls barren of boxes or balconies. The rake of the seats is steeper than usual and the sight-lines are splendid, but, after Birmingham, I fear those bare walls and the depth of the house.

#### RICHMOND THEATRE

This feeling was reinforced by the visit to the tiny Georgian Playhouse. When I went in a party of some seventy people were assembled. Although the stage was bare of scenery and they were

to hear only a couple of speeches from Shakespeare, I was forcibly struck by an air of expectancy in this audience. There is no doubt that this sprang from the shape of the auditorium itself. Although the theatre will hold twice the number these seventy visitors seemed to fill the house. Heads, shoulders and hands were visible on all sides decorating the house and bringing it to life; and there was a clear contact with the stage for all. Allowing for the difference of size and the difference of period this was everything that Birmingham was not.

Is acting more important than spectacle? Is a near-by vantage point more valuable than a distant view? In everyday life people take the answers into their own hands. Women swarm over the statutory of the Victoria Memorial for a Buckingham Palace event. Men and boys climb trees and perch on roof-tops and window-ledges when Oxford and Cambridge come rowing by. But the architect must provide the answer in the theatre. The theatre audience must be grouped as a throng—the very word is agog with vitality! This feeling of a full house has immense potency. So line the walls and reduce the depth, say I, and theatre-going will take a new life.

#### ARCHITECTURAL ASSOCIATION, LONDON

Travelled back from Leeds and went straight from St. Pancras to Bedford Square. Reason—to see an Exhibition by fourth-year students of Design for a Drama School having its own theatre. A note by the Principal says: "The Theatre, of some shape, is nearly 3,000 years old; the Theatre as we know it, with its proscenium arch separating players from audience, is barely a hundred years old . . . Historical reproduction of the Globe or of the theatre of Dionysus is neither possible nor desirable; a flexible arrangement of proscenium and stages,

whereby a skilful producer can place his protagonists, *players*, chorus and audience in a particular physical relationship to each other is desirable."

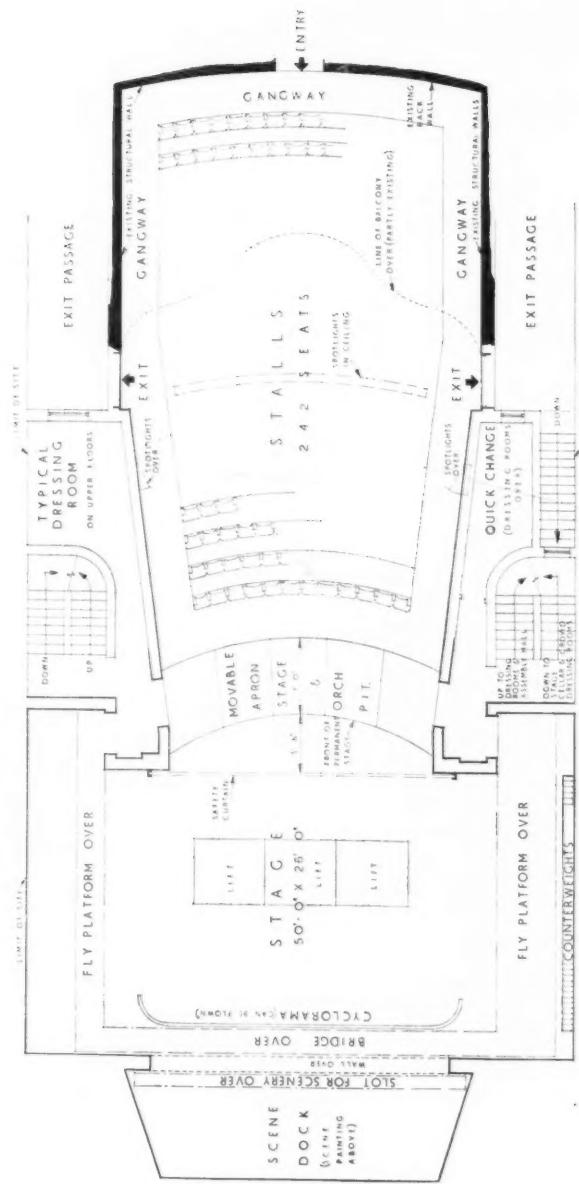
Here is the right approach, and to emphasise it I have introduced the italics. He goes on: "We did not want to solve this problem in a vacuum . . . We needed a 'client' to set us our problem and to criticise our work. This 'client' was found to perfection in Mr. Michel Saint-Denis and the students of the Old Vic Theatre School."

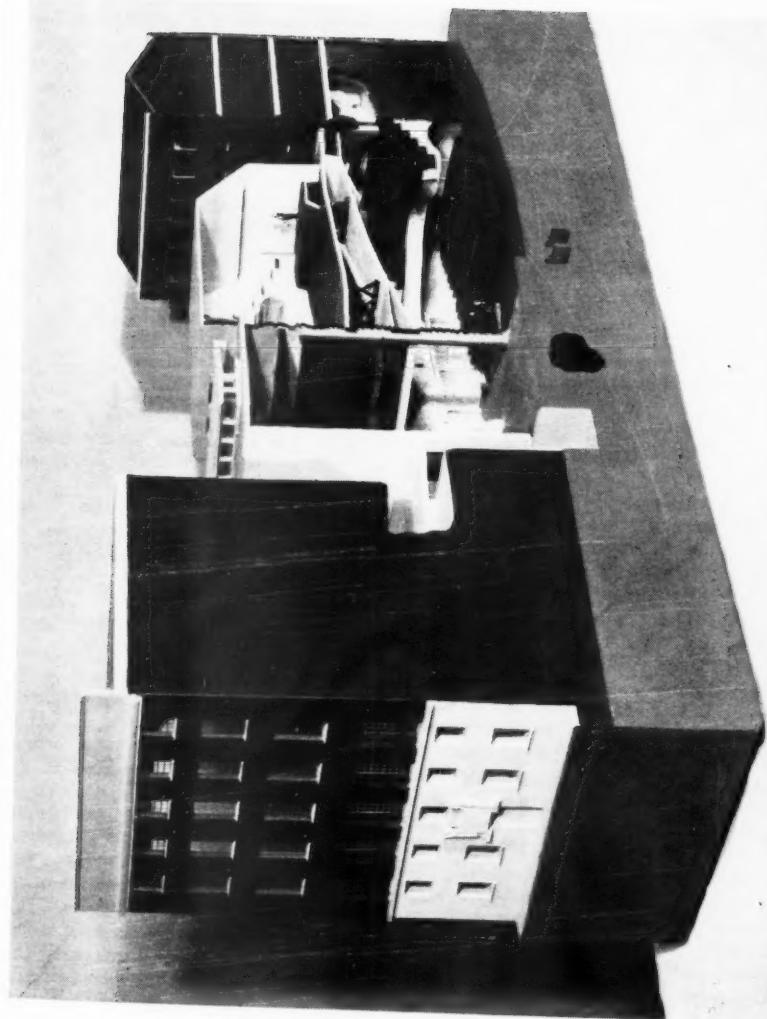
The Exhibition was fascinating. Circular auditoriums, square auditoriums, hexagonal, septagonal, octagonal auditoriums, adjustable prosceniums, fore-stages of all kinds, lifts, revolves, even arena stages, all featured, with the bold abandon that often gives the work of students such vitality and interest. One feature was common to all schemes—the seating converged on the stage from all levels, and no auditorium was long and narrow with distant back seats. The walls of these playhouses were covered with seating accommodation, galleries, boxes, balconies, all helping to gather the audience round the stage. These young architects have realised (or been made to realise, I suspect by Saint-Denis) that proximity and contact with the actor is more important than a central view of the stage picture.

Here was real hope for the theatres that are to come. But there is one thing more to be said, and it is the "Open Sesame" to the whole vista of future theatre planning. Our gathered-round-the-stage playhouse will inevitably contain many side seats at a very oblique angle. The pricing of seats, therefore, must be altered. The side seats, stage boxes and so on, instead of costing most, must cost least. If that is accepted the architect can start work. Our theatres will fill up from the front and our actors will have us playgoers where they want us.

# THE NEW R.A.D.A. THEATRE

seen in a plan and a model by the Architect, Alister MacDonald, F.R.I.B.A., who with the Principal, Sir Kenneth Barnes, writes on it on the next page.





*Reverend and Mrs. Macdonald.*

## R.A.D.A. : THE THEATRE

WHEN the R.A.D.A.'s Malet Street Theatre was destroyed by enemy action in 1941 my Council agreed that we should rebuild it in a way that would provide a students' theatre second to none in the world. The seating capacity of the auditorium will be increased from 300 to 400. The lighting system will take advantage of the most modern improvements, with a remote control switchboard, which enables the operator to check the actual lighting effects as seen from the audience. The stage includes an Apron which can be used at three levels, with lifts to eliminate the use of rostrums, trapdoors, and a false Proscenium Arch easily adapted to any width at any depth. The whole stage is designed to enable plays of all periods, from Greek to Contemporary, to be performed in a setting as nearly reminiscent as possible. There will be a Cyclorama, and a safety curtain, and every modern mechanical device to assist movement of scenery, and of course, adequate flies with easy access to them. There will be eight dressing rooms, including quick-change rooms on stage level. Adjoining the back wall of the theatre and enlarging into the present Gower Street building we shall have adequate space and equipment for the construction and painting of scenery with a "slot" in the floor to enable flats to be taken up or down from the Stage to the Workroom; and there will be arrangements for scenery not in use to be lowered into a Scene Dock below. Above the Theatre a large Lecture Room to accommodate, if necessary, 300 people, is being designed, and also spacious wardrobe accommodation. There is easy access along the side of the Gower Street building to the Malet Street Theatre, the whole premises making a really first class home for a school of the Theatre in which all branches of Theatrical Art can be taught and demonstrated.

KENNETH R. BARNES.

## THE STAGE: two features

THROUGHOUT most of the theatre's history the side entrance doors, with acting balconies over, seem to persist in some form or another. In the new R.A.D.A. stage design there is a pass door with acting balcony over, either side of the proscenium opening on the auditorium side. These doors can be used in conjunction with a forestage or a rostrum with steps, both equally moveable, or can be part of the architectural treatment of the auditorium when "picture-frame" plays are being produced. On the side walls of the auditorium, leading to and connecting with these actual doors, will be recessed panels in the walls in what one might call attenuated classicism. The purpose of this wall treatment, besides being the purely architectural decoration to the otherwise simply treated auditorium, is to give scope and space for extending stage decoration where required. Banners could be hung, panels of colour created by means of lighting, or scene-cloths could be actually hung in the recesses, when the play requires that the actor and his audience should be drawn together.

Instead of the usual permanent stage front which is parallel to the safety curtain and gives a completely fourth wall effect, the new R.A.D.A. theatre stage will have a permanent stage front line in the form of the segment of a circle which is at its greatest point, i.e., on the stage centre line, five feet in front of the safety curtain and at its extremes, i.e., prompt and O.P. sides, only two feet in front of the safety curtain. This allows considerable freedom of movement at the front of the stage. The feeling of sympathy between audience and actors will be physically demonstrated by this curve-fronted stage which, unlike a rectangular fronted stage, need never look dull or form a dead strip right across the proscenium opening when not actually in use.

ALISTER MACDONALD

## NEWS AND VIEWS

*THE FIRST AMATEUR THEATRE WEEK* was held in Harrogate at Whitsun-tide. There were over four hundred "season-ticket" holders who stayed for the week, and many hundreds more came as they could to what proved a great success. Here is an impression by a delegate who made a long week-end of it:

"Harrogate!" Taxi? "This is your hotel." "This is your room." Why are my evening clothes always at the bottom of the bag? Now for the Mayor's Reception. There's Miss Briggs in the entrance recognising everybody, piloting everyone into the ballroom . . . The Mayor and Mayoress talking to Mr. Browne and watching the dancers. I don't know any of these people . . . Yes, I do! There's some of the B.D.L. staff, and there's one who was at Brighton last year. I'll talk to the people having supper at the same table . . . the man just behind in the queue is talking to me. Now I know twenty and shall see them all to-morrow.

*Saturday.* In the Royal Hall. Here come the Mayor and Mayoress to welcome us. Now for the Minutes, the Council's proposals, the Chairman's address, the agenda. "Why don't we encourage our playwrights more?" (all right, let's ask the County Drama Committees to do so.) "What about Theatre Guilds?" (there's a special meeting on this later.) "Remember the poor audience" (well, I do. I often sit in it). "Buy more DRAMA" (the clubs ought to take this up.) That's the morning, that was. Back in the afternoon. "Do away with the Competitive Festival" (now the sparks fly;

delegates are popping up like champagne corks all over the place with passionate cries for and against.) "Competition ruins the Festival!" "Competition makes the Festival!" Ay, no. No, ay. The noes have it. "Can't one act of a three-act play count as a one-act play?" (yes, if it's complete in itself.) "How can we make all adjudicators exactly alike?" (we can't, thank Heaven.) Place of the next Conference? Why not Bournemouth? Evening, and a circle of audience round *A Phoenix Too Frequent* on the floor of the Hall; this is all right for about 200, and a good idea for the Village Institute. The play's good fun and the actors in the swing. Look at the delegate on the other side of the ring, utterly absorbed, and look at that one next him looking at us looking at her. Discussion of the many pros of this method, with a few cons thrown in.

*Sunday.* St. Peter's Church, and a welcome to the Conference from the Vicar. The Theatre Exhibition, divided, like all Gaul, into three parts, the old players and playbills, photographs of what other clubs are doing up and down England—(we might do that one, too)—and the trade exhibits of books, toy theatres, colour in paint and in lighting, a gay show. Then a discussion led by M. Saint-Denis and Mr. Wilson Knight on the playing of Shakespeare. How can these delegates be so bold as to get up and challenge each other? I should never dare. There goes one; "Mr. Chairman, sir—." Here, I can't

let that pass! "Mr. Chairman, sir—." Phew! I've made a speech and the audience is still here . . . Back in the evening to St. Peter's for *The Covenant*. Only four actors on a narrow stage before the chancel, but if this church has a church mouse he couldn't squeeze in to-night.

*Monday.* In the Royal Hall a ding-dong discussion led by M. Saint-Denis and Robert Speaight on the nature of acting; everyone here has views to air, not always relevant or consistent, but the Chairman steers us through the narrows and off the rocks with practised art. Readings from *Murder in the Cathedral* by the first "Thomas Becket" in the afternoon, and back to Farquhar's riotous eighteenth century in the evening, so the moralists can take their choice between extremes.

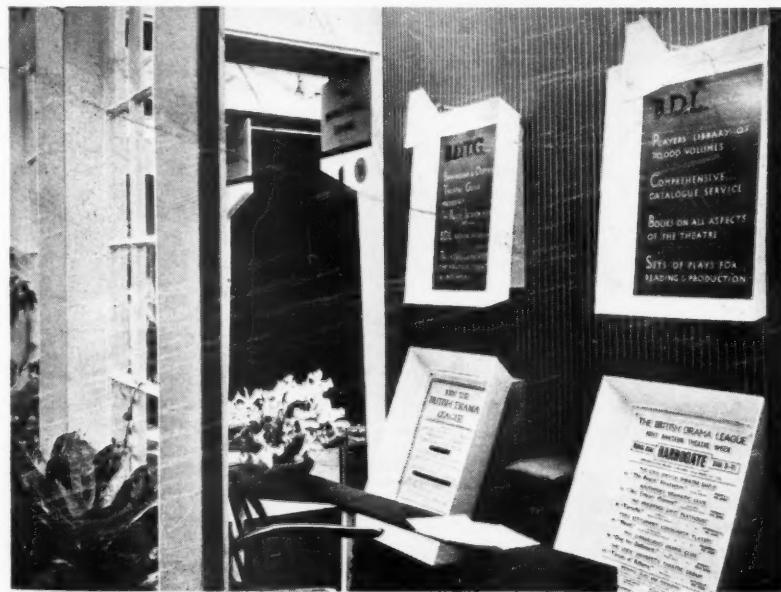
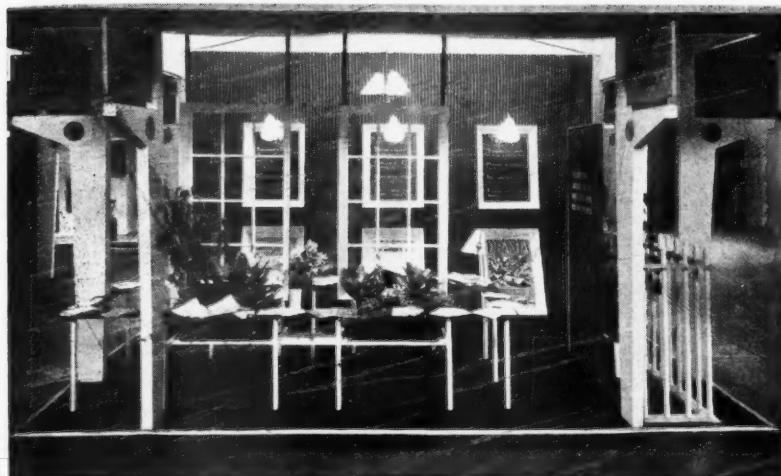
*Tuesday.* It's a queer thing that the one object which every county seems to possess is a cowshed; the dialect records which are played at the choice of a delighted audience all feature that cowshed. (Mem. Next time we do a dialect play, get the appropriate record to keep us in tune.) Then a tour of the lately-restored Georgian Theatre at Richmond on the screen, with comments by the restorer, Richard Southern, who will conduct the actual tour of delegates to-morrow. Why have some of us got to get back to work? And why did I ever imagine that because I came alone I shouldn't have anyone to talk to? Will you be in Bournemouth in 1950? Yes, I'll send you the designs. Yes, send me the MSS. Yes, I'll write to you about the setting. Yes, we did it last year. No, we'll do it next year. Taxi?

DOROTHY M. ROWE

*BIRMINGHAM* was adventurous in its British Theatre Exhibition. Enthusiasm was evident in every stand, however various the styles of presentation, and no visitor could fail to be aware that the theatre has not only a fascinating past but a vigorous present and future. The Birmingham and District Theatre Guild, local branch of the League, staffed a League stand and also organised a big Theatre Rally at the Alexandra Theatre on Sunday, May 29th.

When the curtain went up at three o'clock, the array of sixteen people sitting in a semi-circle on the stage must have looked formidable to the audience which filled the floor of the house. Had they really got to listen to speeches from all of us? Tea seemed far away and boredom uncomfortably near. The fear didn't persist for long. As Chairman, I had got all the speakers to agree to Mr. Bushill-Matthews' brilliant plan, by which each laid in five minutes one particular idea or piece of evidence as his brick, so to speak, for the building of the Birmingham Theatre Centre. A fascinating series of stories were told by speakers who were actually participating in theatrical enterprise assisted by a Public Authority. Miss Gwen Frangcon-Davies, after giving an account of her experiences in South Africa, summed up with a shrewd assessment of the value of amateur theatre. The audience was in no hurry to leave at five; and the Lord Mayor, who had graciously and amusingly opened the proceedings but planned to leave at four, stayed to the end. Most of us moved on to a Drama Service in the Parish Church, where the Rev. S. Bryan Green led a packed congregation in praise and prayer for the art of the theatre.

E.M.B.



Sidney Darby and Sons.

THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE STAND  
at the British Theatre Exhibition was designed by Denis M. Browne as a  
fantasy on the League's headquarters building.

NATIONAL FINAL FESTIVAL,  
Scala Theatre, London, June 20th.

Adjudicators: Irene Hentschel, producer.  
John Laurie, actor on stage and screen.  
J. C. Trewin, critic of "The Observer," etc.

Programme: "Wind Across the Waste," by T. M. Watson, St. John's Dramatic Club, Paisley. "There's No Problem," by Gwenyth Jones, Cockermouth W.E.A. Players. "Jubilee Concert," by E. Eynon Evans, Tonyfelin Dramatic Society. "Pullman Car Hiawatha," by Thornton Wilder, Birmingham International Centre. "The Proposal," by Anton Tchekov, Finlayson Players, Barnet.

Even those abhorring the competitive element in Festivals must have been gratified with the National Final. Two plays by recognised masters, and three new plays, one half-play and half-chorale, represented the diversity of amateur enterprise.

The good earth of local speech and ways had again been successfully cultivated. We saw a grim Glasgow slum, a north-country staging of a new scene in the unflagging comedy of village politics, and, of course, Wales. Where else but in the amateur theatre could this last delightful item have been seen? With the assistance of a full choir, Wales was shown to us as the land where singing is not the least of the manly occupations. All these teams possessed that rare virtue which also happens to be a special resource of the amateur, the charm of authenticity.

The rest of the programme called for other skills. Chekov's jest can be merely grieved, although a recent professional production had shown how exciting an elaborately stylised performance can be. The three players from Barnet, however, undertook an equally interesting experiment by playing the roles quite naturally. Their



restraint and feeling for character gave us a pleasure which, in its way was as refreshing as the Welsh mass attack on our emotions.

Thornton Wilder provided a problem piece. Working on an empty stage seems to be an easy option for a Festival, but the novelty is now wearing thin. Moreover, the players have to spring into life in a series of short appearances only and these outbursts, in this case ranging from earth to heaven, built into a play. If the magic does not work—and amateurs are usually poorly equipped for this type of play—the audience becomes painfully aware of an empty stage and an equally empty procession of American and allegorical figures. On this occasion, the audience and adjudicators agreed. The least (or was it the highest?) praise heard from the audience was, "I didn't understand it but it swept me along."

WILLIAM KENDALL



Thornton Wilder's "PULLMAN CAR HIAWATHA". H. Southwell Eades' two pictures of the Birmingham International Centre's production which won the Howard de Walden Cup.

In speaking on behalf of the adjudicators, Mr. John Laurie criticised his fellow-Scots for "not watering down" their Glasgow dialect so as to make it understandable to the cosmopolitan audience. While appreciating the arguments on both sides, the Executive felt moved to reaffirm the League's attitude regarding dialect in the Festival in a letter to the Scottish Community Drama Association:

"The League has always stood for the encouragement of plays written in the native tongue of the various localities of Great Britain. We maintain this policy as strongly as ever. . . ."

WAS THERE EVER A PANEL of B.D.L. Adjudicators? A reader questions our statement in the Spring number (Editor's Page) that there was not.

He is right. A list was compiled

for purposes of recommendation, and used up till the time when the Guild of Drama Adjudicators was formed, with the League's assistance. The present practice is as described in the Spring number: but we apologise for our error about the past.

SEND US YOUR PROGRAMME, please, for 1949/50 !

Miss Henley of the Information Bureau will make a classified list of all member societies' production plans. This will be used in connection with Amateur Theatre Week 1950, DRAMA, and for arranging exchanges of every kind to the mutual benefit of participants. So don't forget—SEND HER YOUR PROGRAMME !

THE "NEW PLAN" for the National Festival has just completed its first season. In 1947/48 entries were 493 in the "old plan" Festival. In 1948/9 there were 1,021, of which 900 opted to go forward if chosen, the rest being on a non-competitive basis. In those local festivals which desired it, the competitive element was restricted to the choice of companies to go forward to Stage Two. The following impression agrees very well with several given at the Conference.

Since the introduction of the New Plan, the Somerset County Drama Committee have taken a much keener interest in the B.D.L. Festival, regarding it, for the first time, as their own Festival and being concerned about what happened to it. They were unanimous in wishing to take part in the 1950 Festival but had the following criticisms which they wanted borne in mind. In order to ensure a more uniform system of marking, they felt that all the Divisional Festivals in one Area should be visited by the same adjudicator. First-class adjudicators are booked up months ahead and only by speeding up the organisation and planning much further ahead could this be done. Secondly, they wanted something done to prevent the smaller and poorer societies from being frightened of entering. Not that entrants should be divided into Town and Village Clubs, as villages, though lacking the resources of a large town, might quite easily have a higher standard of acting, but by having a different class for the smaller or new society.

Talking to people who had entered this year's Festival from many different parts of England, one found a wide-spread recognition of the value of competition, if rightly used. On the other hand there was a feeling in many cases that the best plays did not always get sent on. From what I have seen

of the Festival over many years, this is true. It seems to be caused partly by the fact that, once a certain level of efficiency has been reached, an adjudicator cannot decide between poetic drama, farce and phantasy except on the basis of his or her own personal taste. There seems to be only one remedy, the division of the Festival into classes for different categories of plays. The English habit of calling any play with a happy ending "comedy" and all other plays "drama" might however make this experiment difficult! And what of plays which defy classification?

My own personal impression is that the "New Plan" has made a good beginning. Had it been in existence long ago, I am sure that some Counties who cut adrift from the B.D.L. Festival would now be happily co-operating in it. If it is to continue successfully I feel sure that it must seek even closer co-operation with the Drama Advisers. It is in those Counties where Drama Advisers and B.D.L. representatives have worked most closely together that the New Plan has met with the greatest success. Finally, both audiences and adjudicators would do well to take for their motto the words of John Masefield, quoted by Miss Esmé Church at Harrogate, "You should always praise beauty when you see it." As she said, any fool can find fault and pick holes, but it takes a wise man to recognise truth and beauty. If the "New Plan" has this spirit behind it, it will succeed.

PHOEBE M. REES.

*A TEA-CHEST full of books came from a non-member, Mr. F. Bray, when he left for South Africa. The Librarian is most grateful for the gift.*

*INTERCHANGE BETWEEN AMATEURS IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES* is slowly becoming easier, but as yet it is not possible to establish anything like a routine method. Each case has to be tackled singly, and arrangements at present take as long as six months to make. Two conferences have taken place this summer which may do much to improve things, the first at Versailles.

The choice of Versailles in June for their annual conference was a particularly happy one on the part of the French speaking amateurs from Belgium, France and Switzerland. To this event came delegates from Holland, Scandinavia and Great Britain (myself)—all founder members of the International Amateur Federation set up in 1947—to discuss the future of the amateur theatre as an international movement.

Several resolutions were forwarded to the International Theatre Institute, but one of the most valuable aspects of the meeting was the prevailing spirit of cordiality, and the earnest desire of all delegates to co-operate with their counterparts in other countries.

This same seeking for co-operation was apparent when, earlier this year, I visited Denmark to speak on the work of the League, and to meet organisers and companies in that country. Lively discussions reflected only the desire for closer relationships between our two countries.

My impression is that in every country which possesses a positive amateur theatre movement, there now exists the desire for a stronger link with amateurs in other parts of the world, and more especially with England. With such a trend it can only be a matter of a very few years before an International Federation is well established.

E. J. COOPER

*THE INTERNATIONAL THEATRE INSTITUTE* held its second Congress at Zurich at the end of June.

There were many signs that the Institute, whose inaugural meeting was held last year in Prague, is now really coming to grips with its task, and that with sufficient financial backing from the thirteen member countries (with more in the offing) and from UNESCO (the parent body) a useful career lies before it. The Congress passed plans to develop interchange of companies, for an international theatre magazine, and for the holding of a special Conference next year on present-day Theatre Architecture. Of special interest to amateurs was a recommendation that, when opportune, national Centres should include a representative of the non-professional theatre, who should also attend the Annual Congress, and that these representatives should form one of the Congress sub-committees reporting to the General Assembly.

Generous hospitality was given by the City of Zurich to the delegates, who enjoyed both the beauty of the place and in particular the fine exhibition of Swiss scenic design from the time of Appia to the present day. Britain should see this important exhibition organised by M. Edmund Stadler, Curator of the Theatre Collection at the National Library of Berne.

The delegates from the British Centre were Messrs. John Moody (Arts Council), Llewellyn Rees (Old Vic), Stephen Thomas (British Council), Geoffrey Whitworth (British Drama League), and Kenneth Rae, Secretary of the British I.T.I. Centre, 9 St. Martin's Court, W.C.2.

GEOFFREY WHITWORTH

# THEATRE BOOKSHELF

## BIOGRAPHIES AND DISCUSSIONS

*"Reminiscences of Tolstoy, Chekhov and Andreev,* by Maxim Gorky. Hogarth Press, 7s. 6d.

*"W. B. Yeats,* by Norman Jeffares. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 21s.

*"Sarah Bernhardt,"* by Lysiane Bernhardt. Hurst & Blackett, 21s.

*"Hail Fellow Well Met,"* by Sir Seymour Hicks. Staples Press, 10s. 6d.

*"The Real Bernard Shaw,"* by Maurice Colbourne. Dent & Sons, 16s.

*"Of Irony, Especially in Drama,"* by G. G. Sedgewick. Oxford University Press, 15s.

*"Immortal Shadows,"* by Stark Young. Scribners, 15s.

*"The Actor and His Audience,"* by W. A. Darlington. Phoenix House, 12s. 6d.

*"The Art of the Playwright,"* by Edward Percy. English Theatre Guild, 4s.

This is a mixed batch; even the five biographical works are very different in treatment. The most impressionistic is Maxim Gorky's *Reminiscences of Tolstoy, Chekhov and Andreev*, which has a dream-like quality, due, perhaps, to the fragmentary memories of isolated conversations of incidents, but due also to a compelling melancholy which we once believed to be characteristically Russian. Strange glimpses are given of Tolstoy, with his pontifical utterances and dislike of contradiction, of Chekhov, tender and charming as his plays (an answer to the theory that the Chekhovian "atmosphere" is the work of translators), of the wild Andreev, who declared that all great men are sick men. The vanished world which springs to life in this book was not lacking in material to support the statement.

Yeats could hardly be an easy subject for biography. In "*W. B. Yeats, Man and Poet,*" by Norman

Jeffares, we read of his "oscillating character," a character which Yeats himself considered had thwarted him all his life. But, as Dr. Jeffares shows clearly, despite the struggles of the "blind, bitter" Ireland of his day, the distractions of a hopeless passion, and the troubles which politics, the creation of the Abbey theatre and countless other activities brought him, he emerged a great poet, and the last years were surely the best. Overloaded with detail, there are times when the book becomes somewhat tedious.

*Sarah Bernhardt,* by her granddaughter, Lysiane Bernhardt, is entirely different. It is not so much a biography as a fascinating novel, with a heroine whose moods, whims, unending energy, matchless bravery and undoubtedly genius created an amazing series of triumphs and tragedies. Other people appear, Maurice, devoted if unsatisfactory son, and many of the great figures of a by-gone France, but, naturally, Sarah, with her defiant motto "despite all," dominates every page. This is a delightful and obviously well-translated book; the style may be a trifle sentimental, but it is the most attractive study of the great actress which the present reviewer has read.

Now that the genial Sir Seymour Hicks is, unfortunately, no longer with us, his reminiscences have what the eighteenth century would have termed "a melancholy interest." Not that *Hail Fellow Well Met* is melancholy; the author is, perhaps, a little too determined to be amusing, although some of the stories are good. It is when Sir Seymour forgets to be funny that we get arresting glimpses of the many famous people he met and the stirring events in which he took part. Generosity is the keynote of the book, which, as befits its kaleidoscopic style, is not cast in autobiographical form.

The fourth edition of *The Real Bernard Shaw*, by Maurice Colbourne, contains new material; there is even a scathing description of *Boyant Billions*. Shaw compels in Mr. Colbourne a wholehearted if irritated admiration, and, apart from the fact that any book enriched with Shawian quotations is not likely to be dull, this exhaustive study of a colossal mind has a penetration all its own.

The remaining four books again vary considerably. The University of Toronto Alexander lectures for 1934 are published under the title of *Of Irony, Especially in Drama*. Professor Sedgewick discusses the various forms of irony with apposite examples from Greek tragedies, from Ibsen, and from Shakespeare—to many, the detailed analysis of *Othello* will be the most interesting portion of the book. In some hands the subject could have been both involved and heavy, but the author's lucid style and quiet humour gives continual pleasure.

The sixty-five chapters of Stark Young's book of dramatic criticism, *Immortal Shadows*, deal with nearly all the high spots in the America theatre between the years 1923 and 1947. The criticisms are not particularly deep or especially amusing, although at times one is given a striking passage, and the style differs from English criticism in the franker (and sometimes harsher) treatment of the players. Also, it is good to note, greater attention is paid to settings, costumes and production. As a record of theatrical events, soon to be overtaken by oblivion, the book should have value.

W. A. Darlington, the well-known critic, believes that the only foundation for a worth-while theatre is a worth-while audience, and in his book *The Actor and his Audience*, he studies the work of six tragedians, Burbage, Betterton, Garrick, Mrs. Siddons, Kean and Irving, and the reactions of the theatre of their day. At the end, after discussing Ibsen, Shaw and our "con-

valescent" modern stage, he expresses a cautious hope that we may be about to enter another great period.

Edward Percy's tiny book *The Art of the Playwright* consists of a lecture delivered by him at the London Polytechnic and various excerpts from some of his plays, showing how various problems could be tackled. The lecture is sound if not adventurous, but the excerpts seem more interesting if one happens to know the plays from which they are taken.

F. SLADEN-SMITH

#### SHAKESPEARE SCENE

"*Shakespeare Survey 2*," ed. Allardyce Nicoll. C.U.P., 12s. 6d.

"*The Wheel of Fire*," G. Wilson Knight. Methuen, 21s.

"*The Shakespearean Scene*," Herbert Farjeon. Hutchinson, 12s. 6d.

"*Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature*," John F. Danby. Faber, 16s.

"*Hamlet, The Quarto of 1604-5*," ed. W. W. Goeg. Shakespeare Association, Sidgwick and Jackson, 10s. 6d.

In a review in the last number of DRAMA, I pleaded that academic criticism required cross-fertilisation from theatre practice. The volumes considered here give a clear indication of the degree to which the Shakespearean scholar has to-day shown himself prepared to meet the theatre on its own ground, and indeed to see theatre history and the producer's role as proper fields for the scholar's work. *Shakespeare Survey* established its authority in its first volume last year; *Survey 2* opens with a distinguished review by Miss St. Clare Byrne of *Fifty Years of Shakespearean Production: 1898-1948*. She shows in it the development from the spectacular tradition of Irving and Tree to the present respect for textual integrity, but the latent thesis in her essay is of still greater importance. "It is a good moment for taking stock . . . when mastery of technique and of material means is so

assured that it should enable the fullest concentration of energy to be focussed on essentials . . . the author's text, to discover meaning and dramatic structure and purpose." This is a pleasing counterblast to many contemporary estimates of the classical theatre. Further consideration of "live theatre" is given by Professor Fluchère's *Shakespeare in France*, 1900-1948, and by Professor Hotson's *The Projected Amphitheatre*, an unrealised seventeenth-century dream of a London avenue which should show every kind of theatric and athletic entertainment. The three accounts of works of scholarship written during the past year, together with Miss E. M. Pope's *Renaissance Background of Measure for Measure* should satisfy the dourer minds who think mere theatre to be flighty.

Professor Wilson Knight expresses a hope in his Preface to the re-issue of *The Wheel of Five* that the essays "may be found to have worn not too badly" since 1930. This hope is wholly justified even if this volume had not four important additional essays; the criticisms of *Timon* and *Measure for Measure* remain two of the most important critical statements of to-day. This Preface, too, states significantly the scholar's practical dilemma: "My own major interest has always been Shakespeare in the theatre . . . but my experience . . . leaves me uncompromising in the assertion that the literary analysis of great drama in terms of the theatre accomplishes singularly little." Thus, while the student of a play's "deeper meanings" will have to be "dramatically aware," Professor Knight, as *critic*, allies himself with Coleridge, Hazlitt, Bradley, in considering Shakespeare "a philosophic poet rather than a man of the stage." As *critic*, too, he "would not judge the well-known commentaries of Harley Granville-Barker as properly within this central, more imaginative and metaphysical tradition."

Since the accumulated wit and wisdom of thirty years' critical play-going has behind it the authority of Herbert Farjeon's own playwright's skill, his anthology has a rare bouquet. The glancing asides: "Henry Irving, a great actor, but not a great Shakespearean"; the definitive judgments of acting: "Mr. George Robey's Falstaff . . . a thing of gargantuan promise"; the respect for the text: "Shakespeare needs no sprucing up. What he needs is disencrusting"; and the judicious balance of the claims of text and décor: "an ounce of passion is worth a pound of paint"—all these are but moments in an invaluable living picture of the Shakespeare Theatre in this generation. This is the indispensable raw material for critical estimate: the vital moment in a production arrested by a writer of patient and witty integrity.

Mr. J. F. Danby's study of *King Lear* has moments of philosophic insight which entitle it—at those moments—to be included in Professor Knight's "central tradition." But there are puzzling moments, too. Considering *Lear* a central document in Shakespeare's concept of Nature, Mr. Danby argues the antithesis in the play between the Benignant and Malignant Natures of Elizabethan thought. On the one hand, the nature of Bacon and Hooker (an uneasy conjunction) finds its imaginative equivalent in *Lear*; on the other, the malignant nature of Hobbes is realised in Edmund. The subtlety of the argument cannot fairly be dealt with in summary but—a stimulating if, at times, exasperating book.

And as to the facsimile Quarto, one of a series. For scholars only? I can briefly plead a personal experience: during the recent broadcast of the Gielgud *Hamlet*, I listened with this Quarto and the Faber facsimile Folio on my knees; variant readings acquired significance and textual criticism became living theatre. Try it!

W. M. MERCHANT

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*The Change of Crownes* appears in print for the first time since it was performed in 1667, as the result of Dr. Boas' valuable editing of a "lost" manuscript. Being the work of a comparatively unknown author it illustrates the tenacity of the Jacobean tragicomedy tradition of stagecraft, vigorous action, psychological understanding and rounded, flexible verse. The subplot contains a delightful caricature of a country gentleman, one Asinello, whose efforts to present his "Agilitys to the Queen and Ladys" and buy himself an office reveal the corruption of the court so indiscreetly as to have proved disastrously displeasing to Charles II.

*Rollo Duke of Normandy* is re-edited with a scholarly and convincing solution of the collaboration problem. It emerges from the hands of its four authors full of vitality and variety, with the treachery and passions of towering individualism in the main plot set off against a rollicking subplot dominated by a Cook who is possessed of a gift for the most appetising culinary lyric—

I'll make yee a dish of Calves feet dance  
the Canaries . . .  
. . . and a dozen of larks  
Rise from the dish and sing all supper  
time.

*The London Merchant*, interesting as an early example of realistic domestic melodrama, and highly effective dramatically, always seems to be verse masquerading as prose, not only in its high-flown language, but in its rhythms, for nearly every phrase falls into a blank verse line. But it is a good stirring presentation of dirty work in the middle classes, infinitely better written than its Victorian descendants, and offering a strong satirical comment on contemporary commercial behaviour. This edition is charmingly illustrated by John O'Connor's sinister, shadowy woodcuts.

MARJORIE NORTHEND

## ELLEN TERRY & BERNARD SHAW

*a correspondence*

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## STAGES AND FESTIVALS

*"Essentials of Stage Planning, by Stanley Bell, Norman Marshall and Richard Southern. Muller, 21s. (pub. September)*

This book is unique. One cannot easily imagine a trio of men better equipped to deal with the subject of Stage Planning than a leading producer, a leading stage director and a leading theatre historian. They would seem to have said the last word on their subject and any mistakes of a fundamental nature which are made in the planning of future halls or theatres whether to be built or adapted will be inexcusable. The book is not only invaluable from a technical point of view but it is delightfully written and the many illustrations by Richard Leacroft A.R.I.B.A. are unusually ingenious and thoughtful.

One hesitates to label any work as perfect, but it is difficult to think how this subject could have been treated in a more masterly fashion.

*"Stage Planning and Equipment for Multi-purpose Halls," by P. Corry. Strand Electric, 5s.*

This could not have arrived at a better time. Plans for new school buildings and community centres are being prepared all over the country and it is of vital importance that old mistakes should not be repeated. Some of Mr. Corry's readers may not share all his opinions: his insistence on 3 ft. 8 in. as the best height for a stage to be raised above the auditorium floor is open to question. Some of us would have it much lower, particularly in halls where children are to be accommodated. The important thing, however, is that the book shows very clearly that if the auditorium is flat there is no ideal height for the stage. The chapters dealing with equipment are particularly valuable and the book is profusely illustrated.

On the subject of junior school stages, Mr. Corry is really inspired and it is earnestly to be hoped that his suggested plan for the junior school shall receive the serious consideration of every Education Authority. Those who regard with disfavour anything in the nature of theatrical equipment for young children often fail to see that a plain room of institutional aspect does not invite the fullest play of imagination. Mr. Corry offers something which is at once unrestricing, exciting and charming.

*"Festival Drama," a handbook for Amateur Productions, by Isabel Chisman. Methuen, 7s. 6d.*

This is definitely not "just another of those books." It is an extremely valuable document from which any society entering a festival for the first time may learn a very great deal. Miss Chisman answers all the questions commonly asked by inexperienced groups concerning the five headings under which adjudicators assess festival work, and her answers are clear, thoughtful and concise. Moreover, they are enlightening not only in themselves, but in the obviously unconscious reflection they cast on some of our adjudicators. In other words, the majority of these questions would not have been asked had the festival adjudicator known his job as well as this writer knows hers.

Miss Chisman steers a midway course between the traditional and revolutionary schools of thought which always tug so destructively at each other at a time of renaissance. She sees the folly and the wisdom of both and condemns neither. Perhaps, after all, some debt of gratitude is owed to those adjudicators whose inadequacy has compelled Miss Chisman to write the very things which every conscientious novice of the Theatre most needs to read.

CHARLES THOMAS

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THE RETURN OF AGAMEMNON FROM TROY  
*A scene from the Bradfield College production of Aeschylus' tragedy in their open-air Greek Theatre.*

## EAST ANGLIAN VILLAGE

**T**HREE are 600 people in this village where my husband has been the doctor for nearly seventeen years. During this time we have done thirty-three plays and have proved—we think—that nothing but the best is good enough for village folk!

We began with the children and in our lovely garden setting did *Midsummer Night's Dream*—Titania and Oberon were ten years old, Puck six-and-a-half, the fairies five, and the changeling boy three! The mortals were played by girls of fourteen. The village was enchanted for there was real "fairy" in it. These children continued with me until they departed on their various vocations at eighteen or after; some have remained to be in all thirty-three plays.

The next winter we took over the W.I. Drama and with an all-women cast won the County Shield with Hermon Ould's *The Discovery*. This we followed by Laurence Housman's *Brother Wolf* and *Brother Sun*. During the next two years we won not only the shield but also the B.D.L. Festival at Boston and were tenth and eleventh on the list of sixty-five plays in the Eastern Area, with the morality *The World and the Child* and Rosalind Vallance's lovely version of the Greek myth *Persephone*. The Doctor was "The World" and "Dis," but otherwise the whole cast was women and children—even "Manhood Mighty."

Then came the war and the end of Festivals and we embarked upon full-length plays. Mona Swann's Bible play *At the Well of Bethlehem* was best loved by the village; a cast of fifty-four including seventeen men and boys squeezed into the small kitchen of the village hall (which serves as dressing room) and on to the stage which we have to build of oil cans and boards whenever we do a play. All the rehearsing is done in the old stone-

floored kitchen of this house. Fortunately I at once invested in some really good black curtains which make a striking background for most things; cream-coloured heavy silk drawing room curtains make a change. We always use two or more stage levels and contrive really good lighting, so necessary to any kind of illusion in a small hall. Our next plays were Clemence Dane's *Will Shakespeare* and *The Winter's Tale*, in the garden. When the children were sixteen we did a full-length *Merchant of Venice* treated as an enchanted fairy tale, as it seems to me it ought to be, and played non-stop by means of a traverse curtain. The magic of Venice was brought to us by a truly wonderful back scene painted by our artist on the estate. We were fortunate indeed to find him here for there is nothing he cannot paint and the most utter rubbish is transformed into rocks and cypress trees, pillars and fountains, arches and palaces. We always make *everything* that we use, and having lived in Italy for some years I have gathered together some very beautiful clothes. It seems to me a terrible waste of opportunity to put drab and sordid things on the stage. "Where there is no vision, the people perish."

Then came our culminating achievement. We did a full length *Romeo and Juliet*, made possible by a young cousin of Margaret Rutherford choosing to spend his demob. leave here. He played Romeo, and contrived a wonderful balcony in collaboration with our artist. He helped to produce the play, beginning by teaching the village lads to fence with real swords. The land army girls provided the "Armed Retainers" with great spirit and I was proud indeed of our village Juliet (one of the original fairies) who played the part with moving simplicity and sincerity. All the young people found it a

really great experience and it considerably astounded several people who came from London to see it.

At last the Festivals began again and these same young people did Yeats' *The Countess Cathleen* and found it endlessly interesting. We were all ready to go to Boston when down came the snow; and so the most brilliant troupe of youngsters I ever had never got there at all, for the next year some of them had to go into the army.

With a new group—more men this time—we attempted *The Bride Feast*, but St. Francis was only able to come to three rehearsals and did not know his part. But the rest of us had the greatest joy in this play and never regretted our attempt. Another group of children at their first entry won the Runners-up Shield at the Stamford Youth Festival with Milne's *The Princess and the Woodcutter*. The new W.I. team—most of them had never been on a stage before—just missed the shield by three marks with Hans Sachs' *The Wandering Scholar*, the great joy of which was a marvellous horse (two boys) upon which the scholar rode away! Now we are doing *Sister Gold* for the W. I. Festival on January 22nd, all women once more. They love doing the robbers.

To my mind, the choice of play is all important and should be given more weight, for of necessity it is the foundation of the work. I must admit it is increasingly difficult to find one-act plays of the first quality, but so far I have not had to descend to the second-rate. Having no men and utterly refusing to be limited to kitchen and parlour plays, I am forced to give the men's parts to women with sometimes very striking results.

In a series of Nativity plays, *The Coventry Nativity Play*, *Mona Swann's Glad Tidings*, Margaret Cropper's *Nativity with Angels*, and Laurence Housman's *Bethlehem*, it has been my delight to get together C. of E., Wesleyans and Roman Catholics in the Old Parish Church. M. E. TUDOR PARKER

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## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Sir,

In your Summer edition of DRAMA I note that, in his article on Kaj Munk, Mr. R. P. Keigwin says "a Swedish film version of 'The Word' is at present being shown with success in America."

This is only part of the story. The film has been specially imported and subtitled in English by the Federation of Film Societies. It has not been publicly shown so far, but we gave it a first showing last February. If any of your readers are particularly interested in seeing *The Word*, they should drop a gentle hint to their local Film Society.

Yours sincerely,

F. BRUCE JACKSON,  
*Hon. Sec., Manchester Film Institute Society*

*DORSET. Material for the promised review of work in this county arrived too late for this number. We hope to use it in our next.—ED.*

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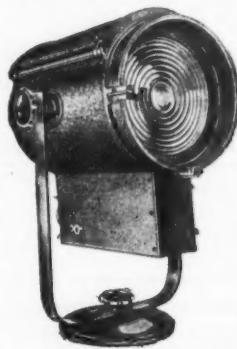
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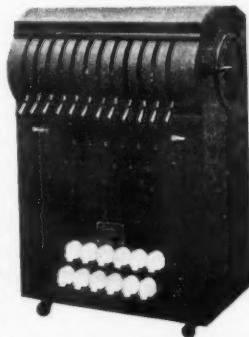
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